

# **Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections**

## **A Brief Analysis of Correctional Re-entry Issues**

National recidivism rates for adult offenders released from incarceration average 50% after five years. Louisiana releases approximately 15,000 state inmates back into our communities each year. Our studies indicate that effective basic programs may lead to a lower recidivism rate, thereby creating significant cost reductions. Currently, operating costs to house a state inmate in Louisiana averages \$33.89 per day and the capital cost to construct a prison bed averages \$25,000.

The key elements that contribute to reduced recidivism, (and therefore the key elements of offender re-entry strategies), are:

- 1) Basic education – should start in the institutions with beginning levels of literacy training and continue through the areas of reading, social studies, mathematics, and writing in order to prepare a foundation for the inmate's pro-social life skills.
- 2) Job skills training – a significant percentage of inmates who come to prison are not employed at the time they commit the crime for which they were incarcerated. Vocational programs in the institutions will significantly improve the marketable skills the inmates can use upon release.
- 3) Substance abuse treatment – 80% of the offenders in our correctional system have substance abuse problems that contribute to their criminality. Dealing with those problems is an essential re-entry initiative.
- 4) Values development – most inmates have a values base that is inconsistent with what it takes to adjust in our society. It is imperative that we continue to install faith-based and character based programs to off set these deficits.

The Department of Public Safety and Corrections' re-entry concept is now being developed for full implementation in Governor Blanco's administration. The initiative is known by the acronym "COrE" (Corrections Organized for Re-entry).

COrE will originate with existing programs, which will be reordered and enhanced so that offenders will begin preparing for release when they enter our state correctional system. They will be encouraged to learn marketable skills, develop new behaviors, and address deficiencies, act responsibly and plan for a positive future. Incarcerated offenders will receive intensified preparation in the twelve to eighteen months before their release.

In the community, offenders will be monitored by probation and parole officers and assisted by groups and organizations that have agreed to get involved, including other state agencies, community organizations, faith-based groups, and crime victims. Creating and strengthening community partnerships will be central to COrE.

We believe that COrE will increase the number of offenders who will remain in the community lawfully, thus resulting in reduced cost, fewer crime victims, improved public safety, and an enhanced quality of life across the state.

COrE will consist of the following key sections:

## **A. Readiness Programming**

### **Goal:**

To encourage and assist offenders in making positive use of their time while incarcerated by learning skills through education and job training programs, developing new behaviors, addressing deficiencies and beginning to think in concrete terms of creating a positive future for themselves and their families.

### **Initial Assessment:**

A crucial part of the CORE mission is to develop a risk/needs assessment and re-entry plan for each offender at the beginning of their sentence. The re-entry plan will follow the offender from the day he is incarcerated until he is released from supervision. After the assessment, referrals can be made to appropriate academic, vocational, faith-based or mental health programming within the facility. The process will determine offender needs and subsequent goals and objectives to be accomplished. The offender's progress will be evaluated and modified (if necessary) with an annual evaluation.

### **Programming:**

The Department will provide educational opportunities in basic literacy, Adult Basic Education, General Education Development (GED) preparation and a variety of vocational training including electronics, culinary, auto-body, welding and horticulture. Vocational educational programs will be provided through a cooperative effort with local technical colleges.

The Department also provides mental health and substance abuse counselling to assist in changing the inmate's behaviour patterns.

### **Faith-Based:**

Religious programs will help an offender prepare for successful re-entry into the community by establishing a spiritual foundation from which he will make sound moral decisions. Developing partnerships with faith-based institutions that will help the ex-offenders maintain their good intentions and positive efforts are also crucial to the success of CORE.

The Prison Ministry Task Force was formed with individuals from the faith-based community and DPS&C representatives to develop a network to help inmates prepare for re-entry. The Task Force will sponsor a Prison Ministry Conference on March 13, 2004 at Victory Harvest Church in Baton Rouge.

### **Serious/Violent Offender Re-Entry Grant Initiative (SVORI):**

Louisiana received a three-year re-entry grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, which is being used to support and enhance the Department's re-entry initiative. This program will pilot at Dixon Correctional Institute (Jackson) and at the New Orleans District Probation and Parole Office and is targeting 150 offenders between the ages of 18 to 35 who have been convicted of a serious or violent offense and are releasing on good time parole supervision.

Following an initial risk/needs assessment to determine programming needs, each offender will be assigned a case manager to help develop and monitor an appropriate re-entry plan. The case manager will work closely with the offender during every phase of incarceration to ensure continued participation in appropriate vocational/educational programming. The assessment also determines other programming needs for the offender including anger management, parenting, substance abuse, faith-based programming, restorative justice, and job/life skills training. The case manager will ensure the offender has appropriate housing. Once released to supervision, probation and parole staff will manage the re-entry process to ensure a smooth transition back into the community utilizing the New Orleans Re-Entry Center and violation sanction grid supportive of the offender's re-entry goals.

A case management approach will be necessary to ensure that the participants receive and benefit from the services identified in their re-entry plan and that there is a continuum of services consistent with this plan from pre-release through post-release.

## **B. Release Preparation**

### **Goal:**

To provide offenders with an intensive period of preparation prior to release focusing on practical survival/adjustment matters such as housing, employment, abiding by parole requirements and guiding offenders in developing an accountability plan focusing their behavior upon return to the community.

### **Standardized Pre-Release (100 hours):**

Incarcerated offenders will receive intensified preparation in the twelve to eighteen months before their release. Mandatory pre-release programming for all eligible offenders will encompass the following components:

- Communication
- Job search and community resources
- Substance abuse
- Money management
- Victim awareness
- Parenting/family relations

### **Social Security Benefits:**

Release preparation will include identifying offenders who are potentially eligible to receive Social Security Administration benefits and providing assistance in completing the necessary applications.

### **Resource Fairs:**

Annual resource fairs will be held at various adult correctional facilities to assist offenders' transition back to their family, work and community life. Business owners and service providers (i.e., faith-based, and substance abuse providers) statewide are invited to participate.

**Housing:**

Appropriate, affordable housing available to ex-offenders is difficult to find and, in many cases, the lack of suitable housing is the cause for their return to criminal activity. Homeless offenders will be provided referrals or assistance with placement to transitional housing programs. DPS&C will work with the Louisiana Interagency Action Council for the Homeless to identify and eliminate housing barriers for ex-offenders.

**Employment Readiness:**

Staff will assist offenders in making decisions regarding education, training and employment. Each institution will have career resource materials available for offenders. Job skills training, job search skills and job survival skills are essential for inmates to remain employed after released. In conjunction with the federally funded SVORI, sixty-four companies in the New Orleans area will work with staff to hire ex-felons. These employers represent hotels, fast food restaurants, construction, warehouse, shipyards, and trucking industries, etc. A website will link offenders with potential employers prior to release.

**Portfolios:**

Offenders participating in the federally funded SVORI grant will be provided a portfolio prior to their release which will include the following information:

- Resume'
- Job certificates received during incarceration
- Social Security card
- State identification card or driver's license (if offender is able to renew driver's license)
- Community resource directory for their region
- Discharge assessment/re-entry plan (community referrals, housing, probation and parole, education, substance abuse, employment, etc.)
- OSHA Card (if applicable)

**Identification Cards:**

State identification or driver's licenses will be made on-site for inmates prior to discharge. The Office of Motor Vehicles will pilot this program at Dixon Correctional Institute (Jackson), Avoyelles Correctional Center (Cottonport), Elayn Hunt Correctional Center and Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (St. Gabriel).

**Discharge Assessment:**

The Discharge Assessment prepared prior to release is designed to assist probation and parole officers in managing their caseloads and to prioritize their supervision lists. The document will provide the offender's work history, disciplinary record, discharge location (i.e., a dorm, working cellblock, extended lock down), custody status at discharge as well as educational/vocational accomplishments, faith-based participation, community referrals, employment and housing plans.

**Community Resources:**

Staff will educate releasing inmates about services available through state and federal social service agencies (i.e., Labor, DSS, DHH, LRS, etc.) as well as disability social security benefits/applications (medical cards, medical referrals, mental health referrals and SSI benefits).

**C. Community Corrections****Goal:**

To support offenders in their transition into the community and help them remain there as productive citizens by monitoring behavior, identifying and referring them to community programs and developing partnerships with volunteer groups, local law enforcement, faith-based institutions and other organizations that can help them maintain their positive efforts.

**Revocation Center:**

The Revocation Center is being proposed as an alternative to revocation for probation or parole technical violators. The Revocation Center will be a 90-day, results-oriented program that will offer substance abuse counseling, job skills, violent aggressor program, GED/Educational, and cognitive skills training. A weekly evaluation of the offender's progress will be vital to the success of this center which is planned to be piloted at Concordia Parish Correctional Center.

**Sanction Grid:**

Will be implemented in an effort to reduce the number of technical revocations. It will provide intermediate sanctions for each infraction a parolee commits and addresses the parolee's needs (i.e., substance abuse, anger management, etc.) through the New Orleans Re-Entry Center. Sanctions will include treatment/services referral, structured housing, community service work, curfew, electronic monitoring, increased drug testing and home incarceration. A sanctioning rationale is needed to apply to offenders who commit technical violations, but can be safely maintained in the community with intervention and enhanced monitoring.

**New Orleans Re-Entry Center:**

Freedom of Spirit Ministries will have an on-site program operating during and after office hours so that offenders can receive support to redirect their lives in a spiritual environment targeting areas such as substance abuse, parenting, building self-esteem and job readiness.

**Regional Work Release:**

A long-range CORE objective involves increasing the work release component.

**Blue Walters:**

A parolee with a substance abuse problem can be immediately referred to the Blue Walters custodial drug treatment program for 30 days without the delay of a formal violation process. The parolee will be returned to supervision upon satisfactory completion.

**Anger Management:**

Violent parolees can be referred to the New Orleans Forensic Evaluation and Treatment Program located on site at the New Orleans West Probation and Parole office to help them deal with their anger and behavior issues.

**Tax Incentives for Employers:**

Employers willing to hire ex-offenders will earn federal income tax credits for hiring ex-felons. A Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) for up to \$2,400 for new hires is available.

**Transportation:**

Offenders releasing to the New Orleans area will receive bus tokens to facilitate their transportation to job interviews and to attend meetings associated with the re-entry program. Preliminary plans are underway to expand this service statewide.

**Community Assistance:**

The Department has long enjoyed the benefits of collaborative efforts through years of experience with multi-agency grants, cooperative endeavor agreements with local governmental jurisdictions, interagency agreements with state universities and volunteer service projects with a host of faith-based organizations. The Department will continue to solicit the involvement of faith-based organizations, agencies, groups and individuals throughout the state to join us as partners in supporting the offenders' return to society.

**Evaluation:**

The Department will develop a database to assist in collecting and reviewing data relevant to arrest rates, violations of conditions of release (as compared with a control group of non-participants), and recidivism rates to evaluate the program's effectiveness.